

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 2647

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SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN ELECTIONS: MAKING CLEAR WHERE WE STAND

1. HAVING DECIDED THAT AN ALL-COURT PRESS WAS UNWISE, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME TODAY WITH TWO CRITICAL PLAYERS: MARIO MERCADO (THE AMBITIOUS MAYOR OF LA PAZ AND BANZER CONFIDANT WHO IS DYING TO SUCCEED WHOEVER IS BOLIVIA'S NEXT PRESIDENT) AND ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF VICTOR GONZALES. (I ALSO CONSULTED WITH THE VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR LAST NIGHT WHO ASSURED ME HE WOULD CONTACT SEVERAL GENERALS TO MAKE CLEAR THAT VENEZUELA'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT WOULD DRY UP IF ELECTIONS WERE CANCELED.)

2. MERCADO OPENED BY SAYING, AS I KNEW, HE WAS OPPOSED TO ELECTIONS AND ON MONDAY HIS POINT OF VIEW WOULD BE VINDICATED. HE BASED HIS CASE FOR POSTPONING ELECTIONS LARGELY ON THE ECONOMY, CONCLUDING BOLIVIA COULD NOT AFFORD DEMOCRACY. I ELABORATED WHAT I THOUGHT MIGHT BE AVAILABLE IN TERMS OF US ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR AN ELECTED GOVERNMENT AND CONCLUDED THAT NO REASONABLE MAN COULD SEE THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF THE PLITICAL TRANSITION AS GREATER THAN THIS SUPPORT, WHICH WE WOULD HAVE TO RECONSIDER IN THE CASE OF POSTPONED ELECTIONS. I ALSO REVIEWED THE TIN SITUATION AND TOLD HIM THERE WAS LOTS OF ROOM FOR FLEXIBILITY IF ANYONE COULD ESTABLISH FOR US

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WHAT WAS NEEDED TO ASSURE THE CONTINUATION OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS.

3. MERCADO WAS IMPRESSED AND TOOK COPIOUS NOTES. HE ASKED WHY I WAS TELLING HIM ALL THIS. I RESPONDED, BECAUSE HE WAS THE ONE CIVILIAN WHOSE OPINION COULD CONCEIVABLY TURN BANZER AROUND, SO I THOUGHT HE SHOULD KNOW WHAT WAS AT

TAKE. MERCADO SAID HE WAS TO SEE BANZER TOMORROW (APRIL 1) AFTERNOON AND WOULD REFLECT ON ALL OF THIS BEFORE DECIDING WHAT TO ADVISE BANZER. HE SAID MY INFORMATION DID CHANGE THE SITUATION SOMEWHAT. HE SIGHED THAT IF ELECTIONS PROCEEDED, HE (MERCADO) WAS GOING TO HAVE TO DO A LOT OF WORK TO BUILD UP PEREDA'S SUPPORT IN THE CITIES. HE NOTED THAT PEREDA HAD REPEATEDLY OFFERED HIM THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL SLOT AND IF ELECTIONS PROCEEDED, HE WOULD HAVE TO RECONSIDER HIS REPEATED REJECTION.

4. IN MY MEETING WITH GONZALES HE ASKED ME ABOUT US VIEWS ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND FOR A REPORT ON MY MEETING WITH BANZER. I GAVE HIM A VERY STRONG STATEMENT OF US SUPPORT FOR THE ELECTION PROCESS. I TOLD HIM I ASSUMED BANZER WOULD FILL IN HIS CABINET ON MY VISIT, SO I THOUGH THERE WAS NO HARM IN GIVING HIM THE ESSENCE OF IT NOW. THE ESSENCE WAS THAT THE US, IN LIGHT OF ITS STRONG SUPPORT FOR ELECTIONS, WAS PREPARED TO BE VERY HELPFUL ON INCREASED AID AND QUITE FLEXIBLE ON TIN THIS YEAR--TO THE EXTENT THAT, IN MY OPINION, BOTH THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM AND TIN ARGUED EMPHATICALLY FOR, NOT AGAINST, ELECTIONS. I WAS SURE BANZER WOULD FILL IN HIS COMMANDERS ON THE SPECIFICS.

5. COMMENT: I DO NOT BELIEVE THERE IS MORE THAT I CAN OR SHOULD DO WITH KEY GOVERNMENT FIGURES AND BANZER ADVISERS. THE ODDS ON NEXT WEEK'S DECISION ARE HEAVILY CONFIDENTIAL

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AGAINST '78 ELECTIONS. THE SLIM CHANCES FOR MAINTAINING THE ELECTION SHCHEDULE WILL BE GREATEST IF A DIFFERENCE OF VIEW DEVELOPS BETWEEN BANZER AND THE ARMY, THE DECISION PROCESS THEREFORE DRAGS OUT, THE IMAGE OF BANZER TRYING TO HANG ON TO POWER HIMSELF GAINS RECOGNITION AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND ANTI-BANZER MILITARY ELEMENTS THUS BEGIN TO RAISE THE SPECTRE OF STRIDENT, MAYBE EVEN VIOLENT, OPPOSITION TO BANZER'S PREFERENCES. ONLY SUCH PRESSURE WILL BEND BANZER NOW.
BOEKER

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